



Native Pine Forest Restoration

–Recovery Act Projects –

Archuleta County

The Pagosa Public Lands Office mounted a large reforestation effort this year, which was the culmination of several years of work to restore about 400 acres of BLM lands southwest of Chromo, Colorado. The goal is to restore healthy ponderosa pine stands on Vigil and Abeyta Mesas. The Recovery Act funded the planting of native seedlings on 252 acres, while the American Forests Global ReLeaf Grant Program funded planting on 167 acres.



The need for reforestation stemmed from non-native pines that had been planted after logging operations in the 1950s and 1970s. The seedlings, which were from South Dakota, grew for awhile but then sickened.

Sampling and genetic testing revealed the non-native seed source to be the cause of the problem. Because the original nursery stock was not native to the Southwest, the trees could not adapt to the latitude, elevation, climatic conditions, or soils of the area.

To avoid genetic intermixing between diseased trees and nearby native pines, about 700 acres of non-native stands were hydro-mulched and prescribed burned. Reforestation began this year, with 126,000 native pine seedlings. Hand planting took place on 422 acres at a rate of 300 trees per acre. Spacing was varied to mimic a naturally regenerated forest.



Most seedlings were planted under shrubs or beside stumps for shelter, and those planted in the open were protected with shade tubes. The goal is to reestablish a native ponderosa pine forest to offer long-term resilience and sustainability for wildlife habitat, watershed values and the forest ecosystem. The native reforestation will also guard against noxious-weed infestations and set the stage for future prescribed burning to keep stands healthy and wildfire resilient.

This Recovery Act project was contracted to:

- Crystal Clear Maintenance from Rio Rancho, New Mexico